

Part of SeaTac's \$15 minimum wage measure struck

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SEATTLE — A King County Superior Judge struck down the voter-approved \$15 an hour minimum wage for the vast majority of workers the measure aimed to help.

Judge Andrea Darvas' ruling on Friday said the recently-approved measure applies to about 1,600 hotel and parking lot workers in the city of SeaTac, but that the city initiative does not have authority over 4,700 employees and contractors working within Seattle-Tacoma International Airport, which is operated by the Port of Seattle.

Darvas said the state Legislature has given municipalities like the Port of Seattle "exclusive jurisdiction" over their operations.

"The Washington State Legislature has clearly and unequivocally stated its intent that municipalities other than the Port of Seattle may not exercise any jurisdiction or control over SeaTac Airport operations, or the laws and rules governing those operations," she wrote in her ruling.

Proponents of the measure say they will file an expedited appeal to the state Supreme Court, as expected.

In November, voters in the city of SeaTac narrowly approved the labor-backed measure, which would require a \$15 minimum wage, a handful of paid sick days and other standards to around 6,300 workers at the airport and related industries, like hotels and rental car companies.

"While we appreciate the judge's affirmation of parts of SeaTac Proposition 1, the voters approved the entire ordinance, not just parts of it. People working at the airport need paid sick days, tip protection, job security and a \$15 (an) hour wage to support their families," Heather Weiner, spokeswoman for Yes For SeaTac said in a statement.

The challenge to the newly approved measure is led by Alaska Airlines Group and other businesses. The opposition put forward several legal challenges in their court filings, but focused on the initiative's jurisdiction, saying the city measure doesn't have power over the airport, which is operated by the Port of Seattle. The Port of Seattle agreed. And so did the judge.

"We continue to believe that we have exclusive authority to operate Sea-Tac Airport," Port of Seattle leaders said in a statement.

Alaska Airlines spokesman Paul McElroy said the lawsuit wasn't about the minimum wage, but about an initiative that they argue violates state law.

"Alaska Airlines believes in fair pay and benefits for all workers. We respect every worker and the job they do. We also recognize that pay and equality is a serious problem," McElroy said, adding that the airline is aiming to jump start education programs for airport workers.

McElroy said none of Alaska's employees would be affected by the measure, but the workers of four contractors they have deals with would.

Weiner said it was unfortunate that Alaska Airlines Group, which recorded a net income of \$289 million in the third quarter of this year, is fighting to prevent workers from obtaining living wages.

Washington has the nation's highest state minimum wage at \$9.19 an hour. The federal minimum wage is \$7.25 an hour.

The initiative was scheduled go into effect on Jan. 1.

Read more here: <http://www.theolympian.com/2013/12/27/2904127/part-of-seatacs-15-minimum-wage.html#storylink=cpy>